

writes of the "mixture of daring and conservatism" in her character, and observes at one point, speaking of her journalism: "She was always conscious of being a modern woman, of being a pioneer in the struggle to evolve a new type of self-definition. Yet at the same time she had conservative instincts of loyalty to and faith in her country, and the social order. So, in discussing almost any issue, she seeks to discover what seems to her to be a sensible middle course, rejecting both the advanced position which she finds too radical, and the traditional position which she regarded as outmoded." This contradiction seems to me to have carried over into her fiction. Tausky claims that in each of the five books he judges "successful," the principal woman character "resists or at least scorns conventional behaviour without venturing into radicalism. Each . . . is superior in her imagination to her environment, and conscious of her superiority." In her fictional technique, the same dilemma between the conventional and the innovative appears to resolve itself into an enthusiasm for such writers as Henry James, yet a continuation in her own writing of the narrative tradition of late nineteenth-century fiction; that is, if Tausky is right, for he says: "I cannot feel that Sara Jeannette Duncan really understood the drift towards a modern consciousness. In some, though not all respects, she embodied it, but she was too divided in her loyalties to be able to present it effectively in her work." This is the aspect of Duncan's personality and art that most intrigues me. As I have mentioned elsewhere, I feel that many women writers reflect in their writings their own ambivalence about their role in society, and their inner conflict is often revealed through the characters they create. Alice Munro puts this dilemma well in an interview with John Metcalf (*Journal of Canadian Fiction* 1, No. 1, Fall 1972, p. 59): "There is probably a contradiction in many women writers in the woman herself Be-

tween the woman who is ambitious and the woman who is there who is also . . . well, what was called traditionally feminine, who is passive, who wants to be dominated, who wants someone between her and the world. And I know *I'm* like this. I have the two women." The question that remains with Sara Jeannette Duncan is: to what extent did she "have the two women"? to what extent, and in what ways, did this doubleness affect her writing?

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Women Pioneers: Volume Two Canada's Lost Plays. Edited by Anton Wagner. *Toronto: Canadian Theatre Review Publications, 1979, Pp. 272.*

No one examining the second volume of this series could be disappointed by its appearance among the current offerings for Canadian theatre books. Wagner has carefully reviewed the available dramatic literature to select six plays written by Canadian women: *The Fatal Ring* (1840) by Eliza Lanesford Cushing; *Laura Secord* (1876) and *The Sweet Girl Graduate* (1882) by Sarah Anne Curzon; *When George the Third Was King* (1897) by Catharine Nina Merritt; *Pasque Flower* (1939) by Gwen Pharis Ringwood; and *Teach Me How to Cry* (1955) by Patricia Joudry. With the exception of the Joudry script, these plays have been difficult to obtain and thus impossible to assign as class readings. CTR Publications should be commended for their willingness to undertake this publishing venture.

Ignoring the debate regarding the validity of Women's Literature as a distinct field of study, my question in examining *Women Pioneers* has

centred on its acceptability as a text in a Women's Literature course. My answer is a qualified yes. As plays written by Canadians, the scripts reveal attitudes and problems in Canadian society; as plays written by Canadian women, moreover, the scripts provide further insight into the particular problems faced here by women. Indeed, Curzon's *Sweet Girl Graduate* gives us, in Mrs. Bloggs' reaction to her daughter Kate's attempts to attend the University of Toronto, a succinct statement of the attitudes which so long hindered the personal advancement of women, here as elsewhere.

And what must the professors think women are a comin' to when they want to learn mathyphysics and metamatics and classical history, and such stuff as unfits a woman for her place, and makes her ignorant of household work, managin' servants, bringing up children, and such like.

Kate does attend the university, of course, and, disguised as Tom Christopher, becomes M.A. Gold Medalist—Mathematics and Natural Sciences, receives Honours in Classics, and is Prizeman in German! So much for equal ability! An interesting report in the Dalhousie Student newspapers during the 1870s provides statistics on the number of women admitted to various American universities. The attitude of male students at Dalhousie, however, is evidenced in a Campus Debate which saw five students opposed to every one supporting the admission of female students at Dal. Much less for equal opportunity! Today, we find it difficult to realize that only 100 years ago, women were denied access to university training. A play such as *The Sweet Girl Graduate* provides a useful reminder of a sorrier past, and all of the plays included in this anthology can be used for source material on the problems facing women in Canada.

My difficulty with *Pioneer Women* is that confronting the reader of any anthology: no matter how careful the selection, one would always have preferred a slightly different choice of material. The problem is compounded in this instance since *Pioneer Women* must be considered from two viewpoints; first from that of women writers and secondly, of our theatre history in general. Wagner, in his introduction, expounds an evolutionary approach in which the bias of inevitable progress is implicit:

Examining the theatrical and cultural context in which these early dramatists worked also provides some literary and historical background for the emergence in English Canada of a considerable number of women playwrights in the late nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies. Mary Humphrey Baldrige, Carol Bolt, B. J. Cameron (Cam Hubert), Joanna Glass, Margaret Hollingsworth, Sharon Pollock, Aviva Ravel and Beverley Simons are only some of the more prominent of these contemporary women dramatists.

There exist over 3,000 plays written by Canadian women prior to 1967. To dismiss this body of literature as mere groundwork for contemporary dramatists does a disservice to both present and earlier writers.

Each playwright writes for his or her own time and audience. Although it may be convenient to impose a logical developmental progression when surveying a body of literature, to divorce the author from his or her contemporaries leaves too many openings for misunderstanding. No matter how sacred one might regard the text of a play from another era, no director would mount a production without regard to the tastes of the potential audience today. This limitation aside, I would

query the title *Women Pioneers*, itself. A pioneer, in the Oxford definition, is "one of a body of foot-soldiers marching in advance with spades, etc., to prepare road for main body." Cushing, Curzon and Merritt worked largely alone and in obscurity and to my mind, Ringwood's and Joudry's careers follow after those who might legitimately be termed pioneers.

English Canadian drama, as something more than a literary exercise, begins during World War I and was carefully nurtured by Little Theatre Groups across the country in the years between the two World Wars. The selection in *Pioneer Women* ignores all the plays written between 1897 and 1939. It is among the lost plays of this generation that we would truly find playwrights whose spade work laid open the ground for the rush of Canadian drama to come.

Typical of the important women authors of this period was Onota Watanna (Mrs. Francis F. Reeve), a friend of the renowned Nellie McClung in Alberta, whose novel *The Japanese Nightingale* had sales over 200,000 and was translated into French, German, Swedish, Italian, Spanish and Japanese. Adapted for the stage in America, England and France, *The Japanese Nightingale* was the vehicle in which Margaret Illington made her debut as a star. Marie Tempest held the English rights; the Comtesse de Fitte de Soney those in France. Mme Tamaki Miura, the Japanese prima donna famous in the role of Mme Butterfly, and a pupil of the Canadian soprano Mme Albani, purchased the rights in 1922 for an operatic version of the story which had already been made into a motion picture starring Fanny Ward. Watanna wrote 16 novels and numerous screen plays. As vice-president of the Canadian Authors' Association and President of its Calgary chapter, she worked

for the establishment of the Calgary Little Theatre and was rewarded as its honorary president when that body became a reality in 1924.

Watanna was not unique. In Ottawa, Madge Macbeth, who also served as vice-president of the Canadian Authors' Association, was instrumental in the establishment of the Ottawa Little Theatre. Inspired by an address by Milton Rosmer from Miss Horniman's Manchester Players to the University Women's Club and other interested persons, a committee was struck to organize the Ottawa Drama League on 9 May 1913 with Madge Macbeth as President. The League raised funds for the war effort with such plays as *The Suffragist* by Dr. Donald Guthrie and *While the Chimes Rang* by Madge Macbeth herself. Isabel Ecclestone Mackaye, regarded by her contemporaries as the leading female author in Canada, won the Willington Arts Competition of 1929 with her play *Goblin Gold*, and 3rd prize in the Penn Publishing Co. International Playwriting Contest of 1927 with *Two Too Many*. Among her other plays are included *The Second Lie*, *The Changeling*, *Matches*, *Treasure* and *The Last Cache*. These women were not only writing plays; their plays were being produced, often before a wide audience.

Wagner mentions in his introduction that several plays of Sarah Jeannette Duncan were produced in London during World War I. Other Canadian women playwrights were represented on the London stage. *Mantilla* and *Wampum* by Edith G. Bayne, a Toronto member of the Canadian Authors' Association, had London productions. As *Papillon d'Or* and *Les filles du Soleil*, her plays *Golden Butterfly* and *Children of the Sun* were translated by Raoul Dupré for presentation in Paris following London productions. Women working in theatre and as playwrights were legion in the period between 1897 and 1939.

Undoubtedly Wagner may have been hampered by an inability to secure clear rights to plays for this period. One play which might have been a particularly felicitous choice for a text to be used in conjunction with a Women's Literature course is *Crows* by Betti Primrose Sandiford. *Crows* won first prize in a playwriting competition sponsored by the Women's Canadian Club of Toronto and was subsequently published in *The Canadian Magazine*, 58:5 (March 1922). Its theme is the clash between a blind old Canadian farmer, born in England, but fervently attached to his Canadian home, and his daughter-in-law, a hard and unsympathetic English war bride who had married his son during his World War I service in England. Contemporary critics considered her role an accurate portrayal of a certain "class of brides brought back to Canada by Canadian soldiers" and warned that "the portrait may cause some controversy." *Crows* would not only provide the collection with the issue of the war bride for discussion, but also provide the farm life of the 1920s as depicted in *Crows* for comparison with Ringwood's farm life of the 1930s in *Pasque Flower*.

The thirties witnessed tremendous involvement by women seeking to create their own drama. College-educated young women graduating in the late 1920s assumed career roles in the 1930's. Several of such women—Virginia Coyne Knight, Lois Reynolds Kerr, Dora Smith Conover, Mary Frederica (McLean) Farquarson—created the Playwrights' Studio Group in Toronto during the 1930s to direct and produce their own plays. These women attempted to create a uniquely Canadian drama. The exclusion of their work from this volume can only be a weakness.

This criticism of the lacunae in *Women Pioneers*, however, must not detract from the

valuable contribution Wagner and CTR Publication has made to our expanding awareness of the breadth and extent of Canadian dramatic history. Theatre and drama mirror life; the glass held to us by *Pioneer Women* reflects Canadian life, still with shadows, but shadows which more collections like this one will help to dispel.

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My Dear Mr. M: Letters to G.B. MacMillan from L.M. Montgomery. Edited by Francis W.P. Bolger and Elizabeth R. Epperly. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980, Pp. 212.

As a famous writer and the wife of a small town minister, L.M. Montgomery was subject to constant demands. Drove of tourists wanted to meet the creator of "Anne," and local women's groups were always requesting her presence for recitations, church socials and Ladies' Aid meetings. Montgomery possessed a strong, Victorian concept of duty and performed all of her obligations with unwearied graciousness, but with very few did she share her real opinions or personality.

In her years of literary correspondence with two men, Ephraim Weber of Alberta and George Boyd MacMillan of Scotland, readers will discover a more sophisticated and multi-faceted Montgomery than the one usually evident in her novels. With MacMillan in particular, she maintained a frank exchange of ideas from 1903 until shortly before her death in 1942. The letters had remained undisturbed for years in the possession of MacMillan's nephew, and were only recently discovered by Mollie Gillen while working on a biography of